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Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
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MINISTERS MEETING IN LUCERNE ADOPT DECLARATION AND ACTION PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Lucerne, February 10 -- Ministers of developed and developing countries, heads of international development agencies and independent experts today called for increased efforts in international agricultural research to alleviate the suffering of 1 billion people who are poor and hungry. In order to help meet global food demand that is expected to double by 2025, the delegates urged scientists to intensify their efforts to increase farm productivity and conserve the environment.

A two-day high-level meeting of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) adopted a Lucerne Declaration and Action Program outlining the international community's strategy for agricultural research aiming to break the vicious circle of poverty, population growth and environmental degradation affecting the world's poor.

In her opening address, Swiss Minister of the Interior, Ms. Ruth Dreifuss said "It is unacceptable that hundreds of millions of people, mainly women and children, go hungry and lack the necessary calorie intake to carry out their daily tasks. It is equally unacceptable that, each day, our generation's agricultural and industrial production destroy a little more of the environmental capital we have inherited."

Echoing similar sentiments, CGIAR Chairman Ismail Serageldin said "It is a moral outrage that in a world of plenty, one billion people continue to live in abject poverty, many of whom suffer from chronic hunger. In order for agricultural research to address the needs of the poorest, international cooperation needs to be intensified. The challenge is to promote a people-centered sustainable development that helps feed the hungry, reduces poverty, and safeguards the environment. The Lucerne meeting has provided us with a framework for intensified international collaboration in agricultural research to promote sustainable agriculture for food security."

The members adopted the CGIAR's mission to contribute, through its research, to promoting sustainable agriculture for food security in developing countries. In this respect, the meeting requested the scientists in the CGIAR research centers to address more forcefully international issues of water scarcity, soil and nutrient management, and aquatic resources.

The meeting endorsed a new orientation, governance and financing arrangements for the CGIAR, the world's largest international agricultural research consortium, supported by some 45 public and private donors and jointly sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank. The meeting invited the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to join the group of co-sponsors; the Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, accepted the invitation.

Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Iran and Kenya joined the CGIAR at the Lucerne meeting. Members hailed the broadening membership as an important step towards equitable North-South ownership of the system of 16 specialized international research centers located mostly in developing countries. It urged efforts to complete the research system's transition from a donor/client approach to equal partnership of all participants, from North and South. In addition to calling on more developing countries to join the Group, the meeting pursued its aim of rendering the research system more open and strengthening links to national research systems in the North and the South. Arrangements will be made, as well, to enter into a dialogue with the private sector in agricultural research. Global and regional forums shall be convened to ensure that the system's research agenda reflects the needs and goals of the CGIAR's partners in South and North, including farmers' groups, universities, NGOs, and international institutions. In addition, the Chairman plans to convene a committee of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve communication between the CGIAR and members of the civil society interested in the issues facing the Group.

Several members indicated they would be increasing their contributions to fund international agricultural research with an emphasis on poverty-alleviation. Among other action, the delegates invited the CGIAR to undertake research in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, to be financed by a separate fund. The Group was also urged to give special priority to the problems of the poor in less-endowed areas, in addition to continuing its work on high-potential areas.

In his closing remarks, Chairman Serageldin said "This meeting has kindled a new 'Spirit of Lucerne' of international cooperation and commitment to agricultural research. The new spirit will guide us in our work to achieve equity and food security for coming generations."